

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The book of Psalms has been referred to as the church’s “prayer book” and “praise book.” These words can become our words when we talk to God. Have you used the words of the Psalms before as your words? Which additional resources have you used? What is your favorite resource?

2. Psalm 51 speaks specifically to 2 Samuel 11-12. Please focus upon David’s confession of sin, and Nathan’s response:

Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.

Do you believe a confession of sin *immediately* follows an assurance of pardon? What does this say about a God who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Exod. 34:6-7)?

3. Pat Miller observed the following (“Preaching Repentance in a Narcissistic Age”, *Journal for Preachers*, 21 no 2 Lent 1998, p 3-8.)

The sense of sin articulated by the psalmist is a real and terrible experience. It has shaken the very ground of his or her being. It has taken all joy out of life.

As much as any lament, this psalm is a cry for help. This person is undone as much as any speaker in the psalms. The destruction of this soul, however, is not by any external forces. It is by the terrible weight of the committed sin and the way it stares him in the face constantly. This is trauma, desperation, a terrible burden that must be lifted.

The focus of this psalm is on the plea for God's grace and compassion. It is Israel's oldest confession of faith that the God it worships is merciful, compassionate, and full of steadfast love (Exod. 34:7).

Do you know someone who is carrying sin (and its consequences) with them? How can you let them leave this burden at the foot of the cross, and through Christ be forgiven?

4. There are many types of Psalms – Psalms of Lament are just one type. Psalm 13 is a great example, and others include Psalms 3, 4, 5, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 41, 42, 43, 44, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89, 94, 102, 109, 120, 123, 129, 137, 140, 143. Is there a particular Psalm which resonates with you?

There are also Psalms of Praise. Example is Psalm 30. Others include 8, 9, 18, 19, 21, 23, 29, 30, 32, 34, 36, 40, 41, 46, 48, 65, 66, 68, 75, 76, 81, 85, 91, 98,

100, 103-108, 111, 116, 117, 118, 121, 124, 126, 129, 135, 136, 138, 144, 145, 146, 149. Is there a particular Psalm which resonates with you?

5. One way we can prepare to confess our sins is through the Jesuit practice of *examen*. It has the following five steps:
- "The first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the gifts received."
 - "The second point is to ask for the grace to know my sins and to root them out."
 - "The third point is to demand an account of my soul from the moment of rising to that of the present examination, hour by hour or period by period. The thoughts should be examined first, then the words, and finally the actions."
 - "The fourth point is to ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults."
 - "The fifth point is to resolve to amend with the help of God's grace. Close with the Lord's Prayer."

What practices do you use to prepare to confess your sins to God?

6. Psalm 51 emphasizes that the moment in which we know ourselves to be forgiven is not so much an end as a beginning. As important as the cessation of guilt may seem, it pales beside a new beginning in which praise pours out of us, not just once, because we owe it to God, but always, because our joy overflows. How is it that we can demonstrate this joy, in a sense that is tangible and real, to those people that we meet, while we're walking down the street?